



# Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

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## Obama Pledges New American Partnership in Middle East

By David McKeeby  
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says that the United States “offers a hand of friendship” to the Middle East and broader Muslim world and wants a new relationship firmly rooted in mutual respect and mutual interests.

“What you’ll see is someone who is listening,” he said.

“My job to the Muslim world is to communicate that the Americans are

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*President Obama gives first formal interview with the Dubai-based Saudi satellite network al-Arabiya*

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## U.S.-African Partnership Developing Drought-Tolerant Maize

By Nancy Pontius  
Special Correspondent

Littleton, Colorado — Biotechnology is a key component of a public-private partnership that could save millions of lives by developing

drought-tolerant maize for small-scale farming operations in sub-Saharan Africa.



*Drought-tolerant maize*

More than 300 million Africans depend on maize as their main food source. The partnership — known as Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) — was formed because crop yields are reduced greatly by frequent droughts in Africa, lead-

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## Obama Pledges New American Partnership in Middle East . . .

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not your enemy. We sometimes make mistakes. We have not been perfect," Obama said in a January 26 interview with the Dubai-based Saudi satellite network al-Arabiya — his first interview since taking office. "America was not born as a colonial power, and that the same respect and partnership that America had with the Muslim world as recently as 20 or 30 years ago, there's no reason why we can't restore that."

While Obama made history as the first African-American U.S. president, he is also its first leader who spent several childhood years living in Indonesia — the world's largest Muslim country — a period he described in two best-selling memoirs, *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*.

"I have Muslim members of my family. I have lived in Muslim countries," Obama said. "In all my travels throughout the Muslim world, what I've come to understand is that regardless of your faith — and America is a country of Muslims, Jews, Christians, nonbelievers — regardless of your faith, people all have certain common hopes and common dreams."

Obama's interview came as he dispatched special envoy George Mitchell to the Middle East, a move that reflects his administration's commitment to consolidating a fragile cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and renewing America's commitment to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"We're not going to wait until the end of my administration to deal with Palestinian and Israeli peace,

we're going to start now," Obama said. "I think it is possible for us to see a Palestinian state ... that is contiguous, that allows freedom of movement for its people, that allows for trade with other countries, that allows the creation of businesses and commerce so that people have a better life," Obama said.

A former Senate leader, veteran Northern Ireland peacemaker and author of an influential 2001 report on Middle East peace, Mitchell is traveling to Egypt, Israel, the West Bank, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, according to State Department spokesman Robert Wood.

"What I told him is start by listening because all too often the United States starts by dictating," Obama said. "The bottom line in all these talks and all these conversations is: is a child in the Palestinian Territories going to be better off? Do they have a future for themselves? And is the child in Israel going to feel confident about his or her safety and security? And if we can keep our focus on making their lives better and look forward, and not simply think about all the conflicts and tragedies of the past, then I think that we have an opportunity to make real progress," Obama said.

Rebuilding the peace process will take time and close diplomatic cooperation with Quartet partners Russia, the European Union and the United Nations, Obama said, as well as a willingness to come together with Arab leaders to consider the broader challenges facing the Middle East.

"It is impossible for us to think only in terms of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and not think in terms of what's happening with Syria or Iran

or Lebanon or Afghanistan and Pakistan. These things are interrelated," Obama said. "What we want to do is to listen, set aside some of the preconceptions that have existed and have built up over the last several years. And I think if we do that, then there's a possibility at least of achieving some breakthroughs."

Actions speak louder than words, Obama said, pointing to other immediate efforts to set a new policy direction by moving forward on a troop drawdown in Iraq, as well as refining U.S. counterterrorism efforts by closing the Guantánamo Bay detention center and confronting the false view promoted by many extremists that America's struggle against terrorism is a so-called "war on Islam." The United States must also be "willing to talk to Iran," Obama said, pledging that his administration would outline a framework for those discussions over long-standing differences in the next several months.

"Iran has acted in ways that's not conducive to peace and prosperity in the region: their threats against Israel; their pursuit of a nuclear weapon which could potentially set off an arms race in the region that would make everybody less safe; their support of terrorist organizations in the past — none of these things have been helpful," Obama said. "As I said during my inauguration speech, if countries like Iran are willing to unclench their fist, they will find an extended hand from us."

The White House transcript of Obama's interview (<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/Janu->

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## U.S.-African Partnership Developing Drought-Tolerant Maize . . .

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ing to hunger and poverty.

"This project, conducted mostly in Africa for Africans, will result in improved maize hybrids, yielding an additional 25 percent more grain under moderate drought conditions, compared to the best African seed currently available," Vanessa Cook, U.S. agricultural company Monsanto's WEMA project lead, told America.gov.

"Approximately 0.8 million metric tons of additional grain would be produced if 1 million hectares of maize showed this increase in a moderate drought year," Cook said. "This would feed an additional 4.8 million people, providing the equivalent of \$320 million in food aid and increased income to farmers."

With the support of Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda, WEMA is led by the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), an African-run charity facilitating public-private partnerships in appropriate proprietary technologies to increase productivity for poor farmers in sub-Saharan Africa.

These are the other WEMA partner members:

The International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, which provides high-yielding maize varieties adapted to African conditions and expertise in conventional breeding and drought-tolerance testing

The U.S. firm Monsanto, which contributes proprietary corn lines, testing of genetically modified maize and the substantial expertise and capabilities of its molecular

breeding research laboratories and data analysis

National agricultural research systems, farmer groups and seed companies in Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda, which contribute expertise in field testing and knowledge of local conditions and product requirements

The Howard Buffett Foundation, which has pledged \$5 million for this project

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has committed funding of \$42 million

The Gates Foundation director of agricultural development, Rajiv Shah, told America.gov, "Our long-term goal with this project is to give farmers access to crops that can protect them from frequent drought, so [farmers] can feed their families, increase their incomes and build better, healthier lives."

By 2018 or earlier, the enhanced seeds are expected to be available without royalty charges to small-scale African farms.

### **BIOTECHNOLOGY AND GENETIC MODIFICATION**

The new maize varieties will be developed using a combination of conventional plant breeding and biotechnology (also called genetic modification or genetic engineering).

Conventional breeding involves repeatedly crossing and pollinating plants, then selecting the best varieties. This method takes eight years to 10 years or longer. For WEMA, Monsanto will accelerate the selection process with marker-

assisted breeding, which allows researchers to find and track genetic material associated with drought tolerance and focus on developing those lines.

Genetically modified crops are produced by introducing a new piece of DNA from another plant or bacterium to strengthen the desired characteristic, Cook said. For this process, a "gene gun" powered by air pressure is used to shoot DNA pieces coated onto microscopic gold particles into plant cells, with the goal of inserting a new, desirable genetic trait. Plants then are grown to see if the desired change occurs.

"Ten million farmers have been using [genetically modified] crops in 23 countries in the last 12 years," Bruce Chassy, professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, told America.gov, "and they have seen higher yields and healthier soil, in addition to reduced pesticide use, energy use and emissions of greenhouse gases."

"Genetic engineering is a powerful tool to improve crop yield in sub-Saharan Africa, in addition to conventional plant breeding, soil conservation, increasing soil nutrients and increasing access to fertilizer and quality seeds," Cook said.

### **CONTROVERSY OVER GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS**

"Concerns have been raised about [genetically modified] crops regarding the possibility of introducing harmful and irreversible changes to the gene pool, human health problems and unknown future safety risks, which may be inadequately regulated," Chassy said, "but ge-

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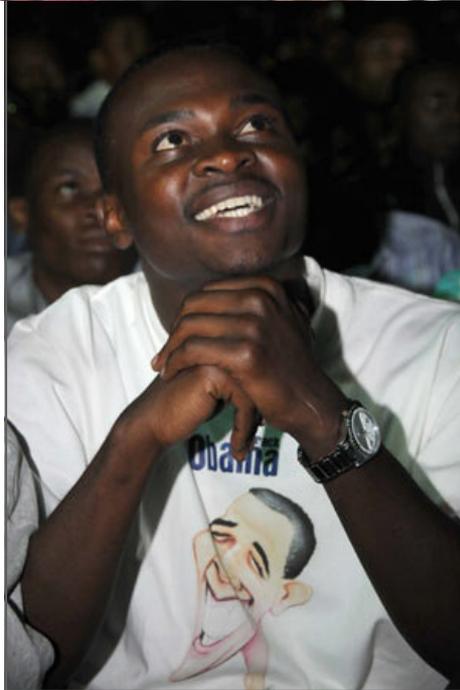
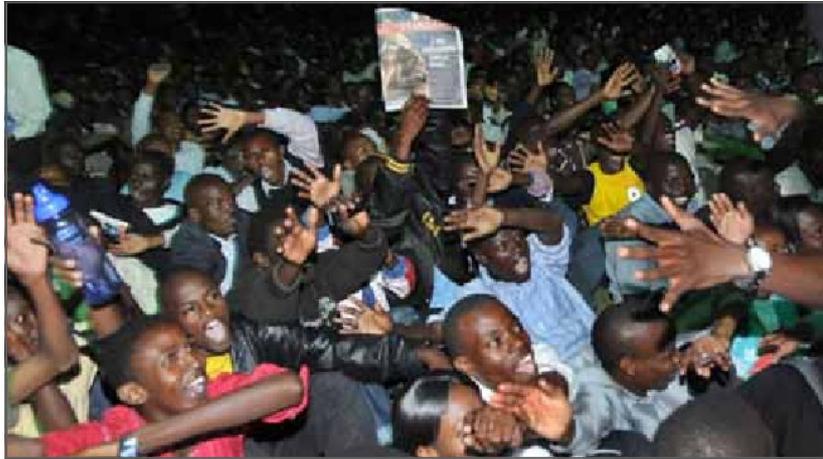
## Kenyans Enthusiastic About New American President

By Thomas J. Dowling  
Special Correspondent

**Nairobi, Kenya** — On the evening of January 20, Kenyans celebrated the inauguration of their new president. Barack Obama was actually being sworn in as the president of the United States, but you never would know it from the cheering that erupted in impromptu gatherings throughout the country, including at a gathering of 400 students, teachers, artists and journalists who watched the proceedings at the residence of the U.S. Embassy's public affairs officer.

For the last week, the imminent accession of Kenya's favorite — if somewhat removed — son to the most visible office in the world had become the news again and, despite some rather interesting local scandals, the only topic on people's lips for days. Virtually every footstep of Obama's journey to Washington and events that occurred once he arrived were followed avidly, with days of commentary from young and old alike.

Via the seeming magic of big-screen televisions, the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi managed to add another 400 excited participants to the throngs gathered on the National Mall on January 20. More than 200 students from 10 secondary schools and nine universities joined another 200 education, cultural and civil society contacts in cheering as President Obama took the oath of office and then mentioned in his inaugural address the small village where his father was born.



*Kenyans celebrate Obama's inauguration*

President Obama's pointed references to dealing with the realities of the economic crisis in the United States and his calls for restoring America's standing in the world were not lost on the Kenyans. In conversation after conversation, Kenyans old and young alike wondered how they could raise new political leaders like "our president."

In electronic programming, media commentary and personal reactions, Kenyans spoke as one as they focused on how the points of the inaugural address that defined the specific ills America faces and will overcome reflected the economic and political turmoil in Kenya.

They wondered where the spirit of Americans — from its founders through its immigrants to its newly awakened youth — could be found among Kenyans to deal with the country's constitutional reforms and anti-corruption issues. Where, they asked wistfully, were the Kenyan Obamas who could break the chains of tribalism and party politics and the culture of impunity, and institute a regime of law?

The embassy's inauguration program was the culmination of the programs run to educate Kenyans about the U.S. electoral process. It now serves as the starting point for a new embassy speakers program on peaceful political transition, the realization of the American ideals of equality and the rule of law embodied in the U.S. Constitution and brought to fulfillment through the American civil rights movement.

Thomas J. Dowling is the counselor for public affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)* ♦

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## African Diaspora Celebrates Obama, Promotes Global Change

By Ralph Dannheisser  
Special Correspondent

Washington — African immigrants and the children of African immigrants celebrated the new presidency of Barack Obama for the positive change they believe it will bring to the United States and their home countries.

African Diaspora for Change, a group originally formed to campaign for Obama but now transformed into a nonpartisan organization, held an unofficial inaugural ball January 18. The ball, held at Washington's new Harman Center for the Arts, combined African-style entertainment, speeches and fundraising for education projects at home and abroad.

The event's theme, "I Am the Change," borrowed a phrase from the rhetoric of Obama, the son of a Kenyan father and American mother who was sworn in as the 44th president of the United States two days later.

Many of African Diaspora for Change's members — including Eritreans, Ethiopians, Ivoirians, Somalis, Kenyans and Sudanese — worked to accomplish this change, knocking on more than 13,000 doors and hosting get-out-the-vote parties on behalf of Obama.

The inaugural ball, which emphasized education, served as a fundraising event for the Batonga Foundation, an organization that supports secondary school and higher education for African girls, and First



*Ethiopian Diaspora Kids with Yichalal (Yes We Can) sign in Washington D.C. Photo/TF*



Book, which distributes new books to children in low-income communities throughout the United States and Canada.

Grammy Award-winning Beninese singer-songwriter Angelique Kidjo served both as entertainer and motivator — belting out songs before the audience of 500 and speaking in her role as Batonga's founder.

Kidjo, a UNICEF goodwill ambassador, explained that batonga is a word she invented when she was taunted while attending school at a time when education for girls was not acceptable. She defined it to mean "Get off my back. I will do what I want, I will be who I want."

"The only thing that can lead Africa toward democracy, economic sustainability, is education," particu-

larly of girls, still held back by gender discrimination, Kidjo said. Education can keep girls out of early marriage and early motherhood that limit their options, she added.

"Barack Obama has proven to the world that you can have dreams and hopes and achieve them if you are educated and you have the determination ... and that it has nothing to do with your skin color," she said.

Octavia Jackson, senior vice president of First Book, announced plans to send 10,000 books to Batonga girls in 2009 as the program expands overseas.

Jackson said programs like First Book are vital because 80 percent of U.S. preschools and after-care programs serving disadvantaged children "have not a single book for the children they serve," she said. "We'd like to bring the spirit of this inauguration to a global level because I know that together we can create the change that is necessary" both in the United States and Africa.

Baroness Valerie Amos, a native of Guyana who rose to be leader of the British House of Lords, termed Obama's election "truly transformational in a remarkable sense."

"Just in case you thought that you in the United States were the only ones who were excited by what's happening here," she told the audience, the occasion was "historic for the whole world."

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## African Diaspora Celebrates Obama, Promotes Global Change . . .

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"What we hope to see is a resurgent United States, a truly positive global voice, playing a positive role around the world," and Obama is "not just your president, he's our president," she declared.

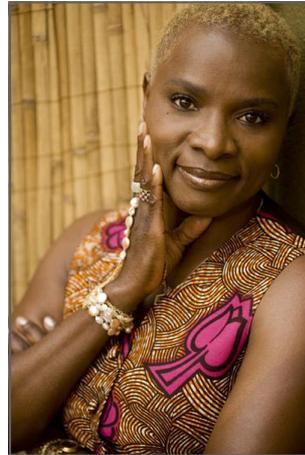
Witney Schneidman, a deputy assistant secretary of state for African affairs in the Clinton administration who advised the Obama campaign on African issues, lauded what he described as the campaign's unprecedented effort to involve the African diaspora community.

"You've never really been part of the political dialogue for a presidential candidate, and we were going to change that," he said. "We wanted the Somali community in Minnesota to go out and mobilize, we wanted Ethiopians in Virginia to go out and deliver the vote, we reached out to Nigerians, Congolese, Senegalese, South Africans all across the country, and they responded, and it was extraordinary."

"When it comes time [for the Obama administration] to implement policy, the African diaspora community is going to have a very important role. ... This administration is going to need your help to achieve whatever we're going to be able to achieve in Africa," Schneidman said.

Representative Donald Payne, a Democrat from New Jersey and chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health and a senior member of the Congressional Black Caucus, served as honorary chairman of the event.

Recounting the long history of the civil rights movement, he stressed that more remains to be done. "If there is a youngster not getting a decent education in this country or



*Angelique Kidjo, from Benin, sings for guests at the African Diaspora for Change inaugural ball*

a policeman who is brutalizing a citizen or a person who is losing their home or looking for a job, the job is not done. You must continue to push forward," he declared.

Amina Salum Ali, the African Union's envoy to the United States, said Obama's election signaled "a new dawn in the political landscape of the United States." Ali encapsulated the spirit of the evening when she closed her talk by lead-

ing rousing cheers of "Oyay, America," "Oyay, Africa," and then — loudest of all — "Oyay Obama!"

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)* ♦

## U.S.-African Partnership Developing Drought-Tolerant Maize . . .

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netic engineering has been practiced for 45 years with no known adverse affects, and instead the improved crops have generally been very productive and beneficial."

To preserve existing genetic diversity, Lemaux said, gene banks worldwide have collected and stored samples of most crop and plant seeds. In terms of human health, "commercial genetically engineered crops and products available today are at least as safe in

terms of food safety as those produced by conventional methods," she added.

"In the United States, 10 to 15 years of research and safety testing of [genetically modified] products make them the best understood and most researched foods on the market," Chassy said.

"In Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda, there are national teams to ensure that the regulatory frameworks are in place for testing [genetically modi-

fied] crops and that the WEMA project follows the necessary procedures," Monsanto's Cook said.

"Leading scientists around the world have attested to the health and environmental safety of agricultural biotechnology," C.S. Prakash, a Tuskegee University professor, told America.gov, "and they have called for bioengineered crops to be extended to those who need them most — hungry people in the developing world." ♦

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## Obama Offers New Approach to Counterterrorism

By David McKeeby  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — President Obama plans to continue building robust global partnerships to confront terrorism, but he has already signaled in his first days in office a new American approach to facing extremist violence.

“Our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example,” Obama said in his inaugural address. “Those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you.”

In his speech, witnessed by more than 1 million people on Washington’s National Mall and countless millions more worldwide, Obama confronted head-on one of the most controversial misperceptions among Muslims around the world about America’s struggle against terrorism since September 11, 2001: the false view promoted by many extremist groups that the U.S. struggle against terrorism is a so-called “war on Islam.”

America is “a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth,” Obama said. “To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect.”

“The message that we are sending around the world is that the United States intends to prosecute the ongoing struggle against violence and



President Barack Obama

terrorism,” Obama said. “We are going to do so vigilantly, we are going to do so effectively, and we are going to do so in a manner that is consistent with our values and our ideals.” Revitalized American diplomacy and development assistance will be essential ingredients in Obama’s approach to counterterrorism, as seen by his joining Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on January 22 to name former Senator George Mitchell as his special envoy to the Middle East peace process and Ambassador Richard Holbrooke as his special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, a region which Obama called “the central front in our enduring struggle against terrorism and extremism.”

“Earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with

sturdy alliances and enduring convictions,” Obama said. “We pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow, to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds.”

Upon taking office, Obama also moved quickly to address a key campaign promise by issuing executive orders closing the detention center at the Guantánamo Bay U.S. naval base in Cuba within one year and placing new restrictions on the interrogation of terrorism suspects. “We intend to win this fight. We’re going to win it on our terms,” he said.

While the detention center holds several top-level al-Qaida operatives, including admitted September 11 attack planner Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, the prison complex has drawn widespread international criticism for what

critics have argued is imprisonment outside conventional legal frameworks.

“Our Founding Fathers, faced with perils we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man,” Obama said. “Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expedience’s sake.”

Obama has frozen deliberations about detainees under the current military tribunal system, and each of the remaining 245 detainees will receive an immediate review. A new commission of top government, military and intelligence officials will weigh how best to unravel the complex legal issues surrounding the detentions.

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## American Envoy Pledges Renewed Commitment to United Nations

By David McKeeby  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — The United States is committed to helping strengthen the United Nations so it can meet a host of emerging challenges, says America's new ambassador to the international body, Susan Rice.

"President Obama's view is clear, that our security and well-being can best be advanced in cooperation and in partnership with other nations. And there is no more important forum for that effective cooperation than the United Nations," Rice told reporters January 26 after presenting her credentials to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Today's United Nations faces unprecedented challenges, Rice said. Nearly 90,000 U.N. peacekeepers are deployed in 16 missions around the world. The United Nations is playing a key role in promoting reconstruction and development in Iraq and Afghanistan. The body is also at the center of efforts to address climate change, reduce poverty, combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases, assist refugees and the internally displaced, feed the hungry and confront genocide.

"In facing the challenges of the scale that lie before us, all peoples and all nations should focus on what we have in common: our shared desires to live freely and securely in health with hope and opportunity. Those are the interests and aspirations of the American people, and they are shared by billions around the world," Rice said in her January 15 U.S. Senate confir-



*New U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice appears at the United Nations headquarters to present her credentials to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in New York, January 26, 2009. REUTERS/Mike Segar (UNITED STATES)*

mation hearing. "We cannot afford any longer to be burdened by labels, such as rich and poor, developed or developing, north or south, nonaligned or western."

Strengthening peacekeeping operations, particularly in African hot spots such as Sudan's Darfur region, will be a top U.S. priority, Rice said. An adviser on Africa during the Clinton administration, Rice said the Obama administration remains "very deeply concerned about the ongoing genocide in Darfur."

"The priority at this point has to be effective protection for civilians," she said, adding that the year-old U.N. peacekeeping mission in Dar-

fur must be fully staffed "so that there is the capacity on the ground to begin to effect that civilian protection."

U.S. diplomatic engagement in international climate negotiations will be another priority, Rice said. "To tackle global warming, all major emitting nations must be part of the solution. Rapidly developing economies, such as China and India, must join in making and meeting their own binding and meaningful commitments. And we should help the most vulnerable countries adapt to climate change," Rice said.

A third U.S. priority will be to build on America's long-standing support of U.N. development and global health programs, Rice said, reiterating Obama's pledge to adopt the body's Millennium Development Goals.

Nuclear nonproliferation will also be on the agenda, Rice said, pledging "direct diplomacy" to urge Iran to join international negotiations over its nuclear program — the subject of three rounds of economic sanctions imposed by the U.N. Security Council.

"Dialogue and diplomacy must go hand in hand with a very firm message from the United States and the international community that Iran needs to meet its obligations as defined by the Security Council, and its continued refusal to do so will only cause pressure to increase," Rice said.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)* ♦

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## President Sends Special Envoy Mitchell to Middle East

By Merle D. Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — One of the key missions of Middle East special envoy George Mitchell's trip to the region will be to consolidate the cease-fire after the three-week-old Gaza conflict, a State Department spokesman says, and to ensure progress toward Middle East peace.

Mitchell, whose appointment was announced January 22 by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, will travel to Israel, Egypt, the West Bank, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, with possible other stops beginning January 26, State Department deputy spokesman Robert Wood said at a daily briefing.

"The administration will actively and aggressively seek a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as Israel and its neighbors," he said. Israel and Hamas, which gained control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, each unilaterally declared a cease-fire to end the most recent hostilities.

Mitchell will work to consolidate gains after the Gaza cease-fire, establish an effective anti-smuggling and interdiction regime to prevent Hamas from rearming, help reopen border crossings and develop an effective response to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians in Gaza and Gaza reconstruction, Wood said.

Mitchell will be traveling in the region with David Hale, deputy assistant secretary of state for Near

Eastern affairs, and representatives from the National Security Council and the Defense Department, Wood said. In Jerusalem and Ramallah, Mitchell will be joined by Samuel

commitment to active engagement in the pursuit of Arab-Israeli peace, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said.



*President Obama ordered Middle East Envoy George Mitchell to the Middle East January 26.*

Wood said he did not expect that Mitchell and his team would meet with Syrian officials, and the group will not have any contact with Hamas representatives. The United States has identified Hamas as a foreign terrorist organization. The trip itinerary is still subject to changes and additions, he said.

In recent days, the president made telephone calls to the leaders in Egypt, Jordan, Israel and Saudi Arabia, and to the president of the Palestinian Authority, to confirm his

2001 that was dubbed "the Mitchell Report."

The United States is actively promoting a two-state solution in the Middle East with Israel and a new Palestinian state living at peace side by side.

Wood said Mitchell and his group would be "in a listening mode. He wants to talk to regional leaders and try to get the peace process back on track. And he'll obviously be discussing the humanitarian situation."

In addition, the United States has been working with other nations in the region and elsewhere to strengthen the Palestinian Authority's institutions and ministries so that it will be able to manage an independent state, Wood said. ♦

Obama and Clinton wasted no time in naming Mitchell, a veteran former U.S. senator and experienced negotiator, as special envoy for Middle East peace. Mitchell helped win a peace accord in Northern Ireland, and he led a commission that searched for ways to end the violence between Israelis and Palestinians. The latter commission published a report in

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## U.S. Foreign Policy Shifts with Lightning-like Speed

By Merle D. Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — With near lightning speed, President Obama has altered the course of U.S. foreign policy less than 48 hours after taking office by making clear that the country's goals and objectives will be consistent with American values and the rule of law.

Saying "we have no time to lose," Obama summed up in a clipped response how urgent he believes it is to reinvigorate American diplomacy and to chart a new course in foreign relations.

After signing executive orders and issuing new directions to the intelligence community, Obama

and Vice President Joseph Biden appeared at the State Department January 22 with newly confirmed Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to announce the appointment of special envoys.

In two days, the new administration has set a pace for taking action not seen in previous administrations. Working from the White House and State Department headquarters several city blocks apart, Obama announced the closure of the Guantánamo Bay detention center in Cuba, abolishment of harsh interrogation methods by intelligence

officers, halting of military tribunals for suspected terrorists at Guantánamo for at least 120 days, ending of secret prisons maintained by the intelligence community abroad, and the appointment of two special diplomatic envoys to deal with Arab-Israeli peace and Afghanistan and Pakistan.



*President Barack Obama gets ready to sign an executive order closing the prison at Guantamo Bay, Thursday, Jan. 22, 2009, in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington. Vice President Joe Biden is at left. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)*

And in so doing, Obama set a precise standard for U.S. behavior in its relations with others.

"I think the American people understand that we are not, as I said in the inauguration, going to continue with a false choice between our safety and our ideals. We think that it is precisely our ideals that give us the strength and the moral high ground to be able to effectively deal with the unthinking violence that we see emanating from terrorist organizations around the world," he said moments after announcing the

closure of the Guantánamo detention center.

The president said that by his actions he is restoring the standards of due process and the core constitutional values that define the United States "even in the midst of war, even in dealing with terrorism."

### GUANTÁNAMO AND DETAINEES

The changes began with the treatment and detention of detainees at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

Using a process known as executive orders, the president on January 22 ordered the Guantánamo facility closed within a year, a process that he acknowl-

edged will be difficult. He also put together a panel of senior government officials to determine within 30 days whether the remaining 245 detainees at Guantánamo would be released, transferred to other countries, or tried in U.S. courts.

The problem, the president said, is that some of the detainees cannot be tried because of various problems related to evidence under federal laws. Evidence collection under U.S. laws must be carried out under exacting standards before a federal judge will even consider allowing it

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## U.S. Foreign Policy Shifts with Lightning-like Speed . . .

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to be used at a criminal trial.

At the same time, the president signed an executive order that abolishes any secret prisons that have been used by the U.S. intelligence community abroad for dealing with terrorists. He also ordered that any interrogations carried out will be under the terms of a U.S. Army field manual on interrogations, which is consistent with U.S. treaties and the humane treatment of prisoners under international laws and obligations.

The 2006 Army manual the president cited in his executive order — Field Manual 2-22.3, “Human Intelligence Collector Operations” — complies with the Geneva Conventions and all of its protocols, and explicitly prohibits torture and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment, and is also in compliance with the U.S. Detainee Treatment Act of 2005.

The field manual outlines 19 legal interrogation techniques and forbids nine others.

“We believe that the Army field manual reflects the best judgment of our military — that we can abide by a rule that says we don’t torture, but that we can still effectively obtain the intelligence that we need,” Obama said.

“This is me following through on not just a commitment I made during the [presidential] campaign, but I think an understanding that dates back to our Founding Fathers, that we are willing to observe core standards of conduct not just when it’s easy, but also when it’s hard.”

Retired Navy Admiral Dennis Blair told the Senate Intelligence Committee on January 22 that the Army manual will be reviewed for any necessary changes to comply with the president’s orders, and it will be called “the manual for government interrogations.” Blair was testifying at his confirmation hearing to become director of national intelligence.

“I do not and I will not support any surveillance activities that circumvent established processes or their lawful authorization,” he testified. “Torture is not moral, not legal, not effective. The U.S. government will have a clear and consistent standard for the treatment of detainees.”

### TRIBUNALS HALTED

And at the president’s request January 20, trial proceedings of detainees at Guantánamo have been suspended.

Pentagon deputy spokesman Bryan Whitman said the president directed Defense Secretary Robert Gates to suspend military commission legal

proceedings for 120 days. The president has indicated that his new administration needs time to evaluate the military commissions system established to try detainees accused of war crimes and terrorist acts.

### TWO ENVOYS

Secretary Clinton announced at the State Department on January 22 that former U.S. Senator George Mitchell would be joining the administration as a special envoy for Middle East peace and would be focusing on Arab-Israeli issues. Mitchell led efforts under the Clinton administration to push peace in Northern Ireland, and led an international commission that investigated violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

Clinton also announced that former U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who negotiated the Dayton Accords to end the 1992–1995 Balkan Wars, would return to serve as special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)* ♦

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## Michelle Obama Presents Modern Image for Black Women

By Katherine Lewis  
Special Correspondent

**Washington** — Every time Michelle Obama appears as first lady, the combination of her professional and domestic success challenges stereotypical media images of black women in America.

As the first black woman to become first lady of the United States, Michelle Obama is shattering generations-old stereotypes about black women and working mothers. “To have a black woman in that position brings black women into the forefront as full-fledged American women and, more importantly, ladies,” Andra Gillespie, a political science professor at Emory University, told *America.gov*. “It affirms black women’s womanhood, their humanity, their femininity.”

A graduate of Princeton University and Harvard Law School, Michelle Obama had a successful career as a corporate lawyer and executive at the University of Chicago Medical Center before her husband, Barack Obama, won the U.S. presidential election. The accomplished professional woman with a stable marriage and two cute, well-behaved daughters contrasts sharply with media images of black women as overweight, overbearing figures of fun in slapstick movies or hypersexual dancers in music videos.

“Popular depictions either cast them as emasculating shrews or sex objects to be exploited,” Gillespie said. “For a generation of young girls, they now get to see a very



*Michelle Obama sitting in church with her daughters on Sunday, June 15, 2008.*

positive image of what a black woman looks like. ... She’s in a good position to be a positive image for American society and also for black America.”

The history of black women being stigmatized in the United States comes out of slavery, which tore apart black families and allowed white male slave owners to abuse black women, Bart Landry, a sociology professor at the University of Maryland, told *America.gov*.

After the Civil War ended slavery, black women “were seen as part of the work force that would rebuild the economy of the South,” Landry said. While many white women were shunning paid jobs in favor of “the cult of domesticity” prevalent in the 19th century, black women “were ridiculed for playing the lady.”

Though negative overall, this message had the side benefit of freeing black women to pursue career success without the ambivalence that many white women experienced when they left the domestic sphere, said Landry, author of *Black Working Wives*.

Indeed, black women today are more likely to achieve higher education degrees than black men as black women earn 57 percent of all bachelor’s and professional degrees awarded to African Americans, according to Census Bureau data. More education generally translates into higher earning power.

Thus, Michelle Obama presents another important image: a black woman who is successful professionally but also a devoted mother

*(Continued on page 17)*

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## Restrictions Lifted on U.S. Funding of Family Planning Services

By Daniel Gorelick  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of State now are allowed to fund nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that provide “advice, counseling, or information regarding abortion,” as long as no U.S. funds are used to engage in these activities, according to a memorandum issued by President Obama on January 23.

Obama’s order rescinds the Mexico City Policy, announced by President Ronald Reagan in 1984, which prohibited USAID from providing funds to organizations that discuss abortion as part of family planning.

“These excessively broad conditions on grants and assistance awards are unwarranted,” Obama said in a statement. “They have undermined efforts to promote safe and effective voluntary family planning programs in foreign nations.”

The Mexico City Policy was in effect until 1993, when it was rescinded by President Bill Clinton. President George W. Bush reinstated the policy in 2001 and extended it to “voluntary population planning” assistance provided by the Department of State.

“For the past seven years, this policy has made it more difficult for women around the world to gain access to essential information and health care services,” Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in a statement. The rescission of the Mexico City Policy “is a welcomed and important step taken during the first days of the administration.”

Obama ordered the secretary of state and the administrator of USAID to immediately waive such conditions in current grants, notify current grantees of the new policy and cease imposing these conditions in any future grants.



“Women must not be denied the right to plan their own families,” Clinton said. “I look forward to working with the president, my colleagues in the administration, and the NGO community to promote programs and policies that ensure women and girls have full access to health information and services.”

The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 prohibits nongovernmental organizations that receive funds from the United States from using those funds “to pay for the performance of abortions as a method of family planning, or to motivate or coerce any person to practice abor-

tions.” This law remains in effect.

The Mexico City Policy restricted family planning assistance provided by USAID and the State Department; funds distributed under the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) were not included in these restrictions.

Secretary Clinton’s statement ( <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/January/20090126192614eaifas0.3502466.html&distid=ucs> ) on the repeal of the Mexico City Policy is available on America.gov.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)* ♦

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## U.S. Overseas Assistance Is Crucial, Secretary Clinton Says

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. development assistance is “literally embodying American values,” Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, adding she will work to get the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) the resources it needs during difficult economic times.

In remarks to USAID employees January 23, Clinton said she had come “with a very simple message: I believe in development, and I believe with all my heart that it truly is an equal partner, along with defense and diplomacy, in the furtherance of America's national security.”

The secretary spoke one day after arriving at the State Department and telling employees they are responsible for two of those three elements.

Programs such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) have generated positive attitudes toward the United States and “tangible results that make a difference in people's lives,” the secretary said.



*Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton waits to speak with the staff of United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Friday, Jan. 23, 2009, in Washington. (AP Photo/Haraz N. Ghanbari)*

“I take this work very personally,” Clinton said, recalling how her legal and professional career has included support for women and children's welfare and concern for those in need of help. As first lady during the Clinton administration, “that part was expanded,” through her travel to see USAID projects at work around the world.

President Obama's “understanding and commitment to these important human issues runs very deep,” she said, adding that the president's late mother had been an expert in microfinance and had worked on projects in Indonesia.

Clinton acknowledged that USAID is being asked “to do more and more with less,” but pledged to match its expanding mission with the resources needed to support it.

“It is essential that the role of USAID and our other foreign assistance programs be strengthened and be adequately funded, and be coordinated in a way that makes abundantly clear that the United States understands and supports development assistance,” she said.

Clinton praised USAID employees for their willingness to work in difficult and dangerous environments, but said they also need to tell Americans who are worried about the U.S. economy and its spending priorities about the importance of development assistance.

“If you don't know somebody who's lost their job yet, you will,” she said. “You've got to be able to make the case that what you do for America is important even in these tough times.” ♦

## Obama Offers New Approach to Counterterrorism . . .

*(Continued from page 7)*

In a separate order, Obama called for an end to harsh interrogation methods for terrorism suspects, requiring that all counterterrorism and intelligence officials abide by the U.S. Army Field Manual on human interrogation methods. The Army manual was produced in

2006 in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. It explicitly prohibits torture and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment.

“I can say without exception or equivocation that the United States will not torture,” Obama said. He later added that “America's moral

example must be the bedrock and the beacon of our global leadership.”

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)* ♦

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## Quick, Careful Action Needed on Economy, Treasury Nominee Says

By Michelle Austein Brooks  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — The United States must act with the “strength, speed and care necessary to get our economy back on track and to restore America’s faith in our economic future,” Secretary of the Treasury-designate Timothy Geithner says.

Geithner outlined for the Senate Finance Committee January 21 the Obama administration’s vision for improving the U.S. economy. The committee voted January 22 to recommend Geithner for confirmation, and the Senate is expected to act on his nomination the week of January 26.

“We have experienced a great loss of faith in our economy,” Geithner said. “But we have not lost the most fundamental of American abilities — the ability to change, to adapt and to reform.”

### STRENGTHENING THE AMERICAN ECONOMIC SYSTEM

The U.S. government’s goal is a more stable and more competitive free-market economic system that will encourage people to invest, innovate, create jobs and build stronger communities and better lives, Geithner said.

The country’s economic recovery will depend on infrastructure reforms to expand access to — and reduce the costs of — health care, to move toward energy independence and to improve Americans’ job skills, Geithner said.

If passed by Congress, Obama’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan will meet some of these goals, the secretary-designate said.

The plan calls for major investments in the nation’s infrastructure. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan “will immediately jumpstart job creation and long-term growth,” the president said in a January 8 speech.



*US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner waits to be sworn-in at the Treasury Department in Washington, DC, January 26. (AFP/Saul Loeb)*

Americans also need confidence in the strength and integrity of the U.S. financial system, Geithner said. “Well-designed financial regulations with strong enforcement are absolutely critical to protecting the integrity of our economy,” Geithner said.

Geithner said the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act passed by Congress in the fall of 2008 was a first step toward improving the flow of credit and strengthening the system. However, the Obama administration believes more improvements are needed, he said.

“I know there are serious concerns about transparency and accountability, confusion about the goals of

the program and a deep skepticism about whether we are using the taxpayers’ money wisely,” Geithner said. He said many Americans believe the program, commonly referred to as a bailout program, is providing too much benefit to large financial institutions and not enough benefit for small businesses and families.

“We have to fundamentally reform this program to ensure that there is enough credit available to support recovery,” Geithner said. “We will do this with tough conditions to protect the taxpayer and the necessary transparency to allow the American people to see how and where their money is being spent.”

Noting that there is a severe recession both domestically and abroad, Geithner said the United States “can have a great and positive impact on the global economic and financial system, but only if the quality of our ideas and actions win the support of other nations.”

Geithner also said he believes America’s national security is tied to its economic strength. He called for more investment that would help Americans confront the “challenges of trade and technological change.”

In the days leading up to his hearing, Geithner faced criticism over late payment of taxes owed from 2001 to 2004. Acknowledging this error to the Senate panel, he said, “They were avoidable mistakes, but they were unintentional. I should have been more careful.” ♦

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## Immigrants' Entrepreneurial Spirit Helps U.S. Economy

**By Burton Bollag**  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — When Ali Reza Manouchehri finished high school in his native Iran in the mid-1990s, he joined his father's textile business and spent the next two years selling yarn in one of Tehran's traditional bazaars. Then he moved with his family to the United States and enrolled in a university. Today he heads a fast-growing computer software company.

His company, MetroStar Systems Inc., specializes in social networking software. It helps clients set up interactive Web pages, blogs and knowledge-sharing sites known as "wikis."

His biggest client is the U.S. government.

Manouchehri, 33, said the current U.S.-Iran relationship has not hurt his business career. If anything, it has helped. "Of course there are challenges being a young entrepreneur," he said. But in both the United States and Iran, "people are always fascinated to hear about the other country."

Manouchehri's experiences are not that unusual. A recent study found that immigrants are 30 percent more likely than native-born Americans to start a business. "That makes sense," said Robert W. Fairlie, an economist at the University of California at Santa Cruz and author of the study. "Anyone who invests the time and effort to move to a second country obviously has an entrepreneurial spirit."

Fairlie said the phenomenon is common around the world. Studies in

the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia have also found immigrants to be more entrepreneurial than native-born residents.

Using data from the 2000 census and two other surveys, Fairlie's study of the United States found that while immigrants constituted 12.5 percent of the population, they accounted for 16.7 percent of new businesses. (Immigrant-owned



businesses are also more likely to fail, so in the end, the portion of businesses owned by immigrants is virtually identical to their proportion of the population.)

Immigrant-owned businesses are on average slightly smaller than other businesses. They generated \$67 billion in income — or 11.6 percent of the \$577 billion revenue of all U.S. businesses, as estimated from the 2000 census.

People born abroad live all over the United States. But they have settled more heavily in some parts of the country, and consequently, have a greater economic impact in those "gateway" states. Foreign-born business owners generate nearly one-quarter of all business income in California and nearly one-fifth in

the states of New York, Florida and New Jersey.

The largest number of foreign-born business owners is from Mexico — not surprising since there are more immigrants from Mexico than from any other country. But in fact, Mexicans and other Latin Americans create on average fewer businesses and have a lower success rate than people born in America.

Immigrants from Asia, on the other hand, are more entrepreneurial and tend to be more successful than business owners born in America. Fairlie told America.gov that these trends are explained by several key factors: Hispanic immigrants on average have attained lower educational levels than native-born Americans; Asians immigrants have attained higher levels.

Asians also tend to benefit more often from extended families, whose members with business experience act as mentors to those starting out. Asian immigrants also benefit more often from offers of startup capital from family members.

Manouchehri, the information technology entrepreneur from Iran, founded his company with two fraternity brother partners in 1999, during his final year at George Mason University in Virginia. He says he benefited from business guidance from his father and from \$200,000 in startup capital from his family.

The company, MetroStar Systems, initially produced programs to automate the writing of other computer software. Then came the sharp

*(Continued on page 17)*

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## Michelle Obama Presents Modern Image for Black Women . . .

*(Continued from page 12)*

and wife. During her husband's presidential campaign, she insisted on being home for ballet recitals or sports that involved her daughters and only rarely stayed away overnight, according to David Colbert, author of *Michelle Obama: An American Story*.

"Black women are extremely encouraged and proud to see someone like Michelle Obama in the White House," Tarshia Stanley, an associate professor at Spelman College in Atlanta, told *America.gov*. "She's representative of a huge group of people who take their mothering seriously, who do it well, but haven't gotten press."

The night that Barack Obama won the U.S. presidential election, he thanked his wife as "my best friend for the last 16 years, the rock of our family, the love of my life, the nation's next first lady."

"All women admire the way he speaks about her and values her. It's very appealing," Liza Mundy, a Washington Post staff writer and author of *Michelle: A Biography*, told *America.gov*. "For African-American women to be able to say to their sons, 'This is an example of a relationship,' is very valuable."

Both Barack and Michelle Obama have spoken frankly about the difficulty in balancing home life with her work and Barack Obama's political career.

"There's no question that it was tough. She had this very demanding job at the university," Colbert said. "If he was at work, he was far away. If he wasn't, he was thinking about it. He was always writing a book."

Eventually, Michelle Obama started getting up at 4:30 a.m. to exercise at the gym on the days that her

husband was in town. When the girls woke up, Barack Obama would have to feed and dress them because she wasn't there, he said.

As first lady, she plans to advocate for work-life balance. But even if Barack Obama hadn't won the presidential race, she hoped his candidacy would correct misperceptions of black families.

"Michelle Obama said from the start of the campaign, 'If all I do is show that we're not all from welfare families or [all] athletes, but we're ordinary professionals in functional families, that will be enough,'" Mundy said.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)* ♦

## Immigrants' Entrepreneurial Spirit Helps U.S. Economy . . .

*(Continued from page 16)*

downturn in 2000 of the Internet-based business sector, known as the bursting of the dot-com bubble. The company went through a few difficult years. It got its first big break in 2002 with a software consulting contract for the U.S. government.

MetroStar Systems develops social networking software for the U.S. Marine Corps and the National Guard that allows Marines and sol-

diers returning from combat zones to share their experiences online — an attempt to help them avoid post-traumatic stress disorder. A subsidiary of the company is developing for the U.S. State Department a game scheduled for release in February that will be downloadable onto cell phones. It is intended to teach foreigners about life in the United States.

"Our niche," Manouchehri said, "is building technology that could bridge cultures."

The company has grown from 10 employees and \$600,000 in revenue in 2002 to 62 employees and \$7.4 million in revenue in 2008.

But despite some concentration, immigrant-owned enterprises are "distributed across all industries in the United States," Fairlie said.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)* ♦

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## Obama Makes Climate Change a National Priority

*This is the first article in a series about steps to address the effects of climate change at regional and local levels.*

**By Cheryl Pellerin**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** — Climate change is a planetary process, but its effects — sea level rise, shrinking glaciers, changes in plant and animal distribution, early-blooming trees, permafrost thaws — are regional and local.

Some of the effects are already occurring, and the newly installed Obama administration, in power for just more than a week, is moving fast to put the United States in a leadership position to work with nations of the world and meet the challenges of climate change and energy security.

On January 26, President Obama signed two related presidential memorandums. In what he called “a down payment on a broader and sustained effort to reduce our dependence on foreign oil,” Obama directed the Department of Transportation to establish higher fuel efficiency standards for carmakers’ 2011 model year.

The second memo directed the Environmental Protection Agency to reconsider a petition by California to reset more stringent limits for greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles than those set by the federal government.

### **SPECIAL ENVOY FOR CLIMATE CHANGE**

On the same day, at the U.S. State Department, Secretary of State

Hillary Clinton introduced Todd Stern as the nation’s new special envoy for climate change.

“With the appointment today of a special envoy,” Clinton said, “we are sending an unequivocal message that the United States will be energetic, focused, strategic and serious about addressing global climate change and the corollary issue of clean energy.”



*Secretary of State Hillary Clinton names Todd Stern as the new special envoy for climate change January 26.*

Stern will serve as a principal adviser on international climate policy and strategy and as the administration’s chief climate negotiator. He will lead U.S. efforts in U.N. negotiations and will be a lead participant in developing climate and clean energy policy.

“Containing climate change will require nothing less than transforming the global economy from a high-carbon [dioxide] to a low-carbon energy base,” said Stern, who in the 1990s coordinated the Clinton administration’s climate change efforts and was senior White House representative at U.N. climate negotiations in Kyoto, Japan, and Buenos Aires, Argentina.

“President Obama and Secretary Clinton have left no doubt,” he said, “that a new day is dawning in the U.S. approach to climate change and clean energy.”

### **SCALING DOWN TO THE LOCAL LEVEL**

Climate change often is described as an event that will bring catastrophe to Earth’s inhabitants in the distant future.

But every nation’s farmers, coastal dwellers, emergency planners and government officials already have experienced the bleeding edge of changing climate — rising air and sea-surface temperatures, shrinking arctic ice, lower crop yields, dwindling forests, intense hurricanes and unrelenting droughts.

There is no shortage of evidence that the planet faces a climate crisis, but there is a severe shortage of one thing that will help villages, towns, cities and regions protect themselves and their ecosystems against the long-term effects of a climate in flux: information.

“Our understanding [of climate change] has primarily been at the global level,” William Brennan, former administrator of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), told America.gov. “That’s where we can see the signal.”

Much more work needs to be done, he said, “to scale that down to the regional and ultimately to the local level. That’s where we need the facilities of something like a National Climate Service, not only to provide information, but to receive data and turn it into information.”

*(Continued on page 20)*

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## Scientists Identify Gene Essential for Nerve Regeneration

By Daniel Gorelick  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — Scientists have identified a gene required to repair severed nerve cells — a finding that could one day be used in the development of treatments for spinal cord injuries, according to a report published January 22 in the journal *Science*.

“We discovered a molecular target for a future drug that could vastly improve the ability of a neuron to regenerate after injury,” said Michael Bastiani, the University of Utah scientist who led the research team.

Each year, between 10 and 83 people out of every million people worldwide suffer a spinal cord injury, according to a 2006 study in the journal *Spinal Cord*. One-third of those injured become paralyzed in all four limbs. Complications from spinal cord injuries include urinary tract infections, depression, pneumonia and renal failure. The estimated lifetime costs are between \$1 million and \$3 million per injury, depending on the extent of the injury and the age at which it occurs, according to the Christopher Reeve Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to curing spinal cord injuries.

The gene identified in the study, *dlk-1*, is unique because it is not required for normal growth in embryos, yet it is “absolutely required for regeneration” after injury, Bastiani said. “Most of us believed that virtually everything we found in regeneration also would be involved in development, so it is surprising.”

When the *dlk-1* gene was mutated,

neurons failed to regrow after injury. When scientists artificially activated *dlk-1*, regrowth was accelerated.

The study was performed using the nematode worm *C. elegans*, many of whose neurons are able to regenerate after injury. Many of the genes important for the function of the nervous system in worms, including *dlk-1*, are also present in humans.

### SCREENING FOR REGENERATION

Although worms and humans seem worlds apart, the worm is an ideal tool to identify genes important for neuron regeneration, according to lead author Marc Hammarlund, assistant professor at Yale University School of Medicine.

The *C. elegans* worm is tiny and transparent, enabling scientists to watch its development unfold cell by cell from embryo to adult, a discovery that led to the Nobel Prize in medicine in 2002. The worm’s tiny size and completely sequenced genome make it amenable to genetic screens, a technique where researchers mutate thousands of genes to identify those few involved in a particular physiological function.

Hammarlund and colleagues used worms genetically engineered to contain a population of glowing green neurons, making them easy to distinguish under the microscope. (See “Four Americans Share in Nobel Science Prizes ( <http://www.america.gov/st/health-english/2008/October/20081010163414adkcilerog0.314007.html> ).”)

Researchers then mutated the beta-spectrin gene. Neurons in these mutants are damaged by the mechanical strain of normal movement. Unlike in mammals, worm neurons can regenerate, so as the worms move their neurons are cycling between damage and regrowth. Using a technique called RNA interference, Hammarlund interfered with the function of more than 5,000 genes individually and examined whether regeneration was impaired.

The *dlk-1* gene stood out because when it was mutated, the neuron regeneration decreased dramatically, Hammarlund said. He then took normal worms and used a laser to sever nerve cells; when *dlk-1* was over-activated, the severed neurons regrew faster than normal.

Hammarlund told America.gov that more than 60 genes were identified in the screen and could play a role in regeneration. The *dlk-1* gene is, thus far, the best understood, but Lebanese postdoctoral fellow Rachid El Bejjani is now studying the other genes identified in the screen.

### FUTURE GROWTH

The link between *dlk-1* and nerve regeneration in worms prompts many questions as scientists look to translate their findings to humans.

The function of *dlk-1* in normal, adult neurons is not known, Hammarlund said. He was surprised to discover that although *dlk-1* is required for the regrowth of damaged neurons, it is not required for the initial growth of neurons in embryos.

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Telling America's story

**Scientists Identify Gene Essential for Nerve . . .**

*(Continued from page 19)*

In humans, damaged cells in the peripheral nervous system regrow far better than those in the central nervous system. It is not clear why, but it is possible that *dlk-1* is preferentially active in the periphery, a question that scientists now will examine, according to Hammarlund. Also not known is whether *dlk-1* can spur regrowth of neurons regardless of the damage — it may turn out that *dlk-1* is more effective at repairing neurons damaged by trauma than those damaged by a stroke.

One caution is that *dlk-1* needs to be activated at the time of injury — activation even two hours after neurons were cut with a laser failed to bring forth robust regrowth. Hammarlund acknowledges that this narrow window is a barrier to treating traumatic nerve damage in humans,

but is confident that eventually “we’ll get there.”

“In the future, we would like to develop drugs that could activate this chain of molecular events in nerve cells and stimulate regeneration of diseased and injured nerve cells,” said Erik Jorgenson, a coauthor of the study and scientific director of the Brain Institute at the University of Utah. “At this point, we can’t do that. But this study gives us hope that in the future, we will have a rational approach for stimulating regeneration.”

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov/>) ♦*

**Obama Makes Climate Change a National Priority . . .**

*(Continued from page 18)*

**NATIONAL CLIMATE SERVICE**

Weather is the day-to-day state of the atmosphere and its short-term (minutes to weeks) variation, according to the U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center. Climate is statistical weather information that describes weather variation at a given place averaged over a longer period, usually 30 years.

NOAA’s National Weather Service provides weather, hydrologic and climate forecasts and warnings for the United States, its territories and ocean areas. Weather Service data and products form a national information database and infrastructure that is available to other

governmental agencies, the private sector, the public and the global community.

NOAA also has an operational mandate to monitor and predict climate, Chet Koblinsky, director of NOAA’s Climate Program Office, told America.gov.

With NOAA in the lead, a proposed climate service partnership would include federal agencies like NASA, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Forest Service and many others.

NOAA also would collaborate with academic and private organizations.

“We don’t have all the capability,” Koblinsky said. “The best climate service will be one that draws on the full capabilities of the nation.”

NOAA and its partners are discussing the potential capabilities and products of such a new service.

What actions should President Obama take to address climate change? Comment on America.gov’s blog ( <http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/> ).

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